

MEMORANDUM

OCTOBER 25, 1990

TO: BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BOARD AND
STEPHEN COYLE, DIRECTOR

FROM: HOMER RUSSELL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR
URBAN DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT
ERIC SCHMIDT, DIRECTOR OF URBAN DESIGN
NANCY TENTINDO, PROJECT MANAGER
JACK GLASSMAN, SENIOR ARCHITECT

SUBJECT: BULFINCH TRIANGLE DISTRICT PLAN AND PROPOSED
ZONING REGULATIONS

EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY:

It is requested that the BRA Board adopt the Bulfinch Triangle District Plan as the comprehensive plan for the Bulfinch Triangle which sets forth the policies, development controls, and design guidelines intended to regulate growth in this unique and historic district of downtown Boston, and authorize the Director to petition the Zoning Commission to adopt the Zoning Text and Map Amendment necessary to establish permanent zoning for the Bulfinch Triangle District.

This submission to the Board follows a public hearing held on October 11, 1990 and a public comment period which ended on October 22, 1990.

Background

The Bulfinch Triangle District is located in the northern portion of downtown Boston opposite the North Station/Boston Garden, adjacent to Government Center and between the North End and West End neighborhoods. The District is bounded by North Washington Street, Causeway Street, Merrimac Street, and Market Street. Long encroached upon by destructive urban change, the Bulfinch Triangle nevertheless has retained a substantial part of its distinguished architecture and famous Bulfinch-designed street grid.

The Bulfinch Triangle will undergo substantial change in the next decade due to roadway, transit, and infrastructure improvements planned for the area. New publicly-owned parcels will result from the dismantling of the elevated Green Line and the depression of the elevated Central Artery.

The purpose of the Bulfinch Triangle Plan is to promote development on these new parcels of land compatible with the existing urban fabric of the District and thereby restore the architectural integrity, traditional scale, and unique character

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of this cohesive and historic area of downtown Boston. The Bulfinch Triangle is one of 11 Special Study Area districts established by the Downtown Interim Planning Overlay District, Article 27D of the Boston Zoning Code for which planning and rezoning is proceeding on a community based, district-by-district basis in consultation with the Boston Civic Design Commission.

Elements of the Plan

The Bulfinch Triangle Plan is directed by policy goals in each of the following areas:

- o Development Strategy
- o Urban Design Objectives
- o Housing Opportunities
- o Historic Preservation
- o The Public Realm
- o Transportation Access

1. Development Strategy

Most of the existing building stock is well-preserved. Therefore, new development opportunities will consist primarily of renovation projects, rooftop additions, and infill of small, vacant parcels. In addition, the new air-rights parcels present an extraordinary opportunity for new development as well as restoration of the damaged eastern portion of the Triangle.

The primary development policy goals for the Bulfinch Triangle are:

- o to provide a balance of mixed-use development including housing, commercial, and ground-floor retail space to create neighborhood activity over 12 to 16-hour days;
- o to provide approximately 800,000 square feet of new housing and commercial development on the Artery parcels;
- o to encourage the development of the existing surface parking lots for mixed-use development in conjunction with the development of new parking facilities at North Station.

2. Urban Design Objectives

The District's distinctive street pattern is reinforced by many similarly massed buildings that emphasize corner features. The Triangle is made up of narrow blocks of east/west streets with buildings of five to six stories in height. The diagonal

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Merrimac and North Washington Streets form the boundaries of the District and create irregularly shaped lots whose buildings add visual diversity to the area.

The urban design policies for the Bulfinch Triangle are:

- o to restore the original urban plan of the Bulfinch Triangle by rebuilding the street pattern and allowing appropriately scaled development on the air-rights parcels;
- o to restore historic pedestrian links between the Bulfinch Triangle and the North End, West End, and Beacon Hill neighborhoods, particularly Traverse Street;
- o to protect the architectural integrity of the Bulfinch Triangle buildings by reinforcing existing streetwalls, ensuring that rooftop additions are not deleterious to the character of the District, and limiting the height of new development to that of the existing District;
- o to reinforce Canal Street as the principal pedestrian boulevard by encouraging active ground floor retail and restaurant uses and by improving access to it from Government Center, New Chardon Street and the North End;
- o to emphasize the predominant cornice heights in the District, with required setbacks on Causeway and Canal Streets.

3. Housing Opportunities

Historically, residential development in areas which had been predominantly for manufacturing or warehouse use, such as the Bulfinch Triangle and the Leather District, was forbidden. However, these areas offer an excellent avenue for addressing the shortage of housing downtown and the Bulfinch Triangle is ideally situated for residential development. Therefore, residential uses, which were initially forbidden in the Triangle and then allowed by the terms of the Downtown IPOD, will now be permanently allowed by the proposed new zoning.

The housing policy recommendations for the Bulfinch Triangle are:

- o to encourage residential development by allowing it as-of-right rather than as a conditional use;

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- o to support the provision of up to 300 units of new housing on the air-rights parcels as called for in the Central Artery District Plan to meet the needs for housing in central Boston and assure active day and evening use of the District;
- o to establish preferences for displaced residents of the old West End in any new housing development on the publicly-owned parcels;
- o to re-establish Traverse Street to connect the Triangle to other residential neighborhoods.

4. Historic Preservation

The Bulfinch Triangle is one of Boston's most homogeneous, intact collections of late 19th and early 20th-century commercial architecture. Most of the existing structures throughout the District contribute to the architectural and historical significance of the area. In 1986, a sizable portion of the District was designated a National Register District.

The preservation policies of the Bulfinch Triangle Plan are:

- o to rehabilitate, rather than replace, historic buildings rated Category IV or higher by the Boston Landmarks Commission;
- o to protect the character of the District by limiting building heights and adopting design guidelines for rooftop additions;
- o to restore existing fenestration or replace it with units having similar architectural characteristics;
- o to discourage new masonry window openings in principal facades of existing buildings.

5. The Public Realm

The proposed park planned for the Artery, which will terminate at the apex of the Bulfinch Triangle District, will provide a magnificent system of open spaces in close proximity to the Triangle. In addition, the dense urban fabric of the Triangle suggests that the creation of a large open space in the interior is inappropriate. Therefore, the main focus of the Plan with respect to the public realm is its streetscape.

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The objectives for the public realm in the Bulfinch Triangle are:

- o to re-establish Traverse Street as a neighborhood connector between the Bulfinch Triangle and the North and West Ends for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic;
- o to enhance Canal Street as the District's principal street and open space in order to accommodate pedestrian commuters going between North Station and downtown;
- o to enhance the pedestrian nature of the District through the use of attractive ground plane improvements and historically appropriate street furniture;
- o to require that new development maintain internal through-block connections.

6. Transportation Access

The redesign of the Central Artery will introduce substantial improvements into the District. However, certain aspects of the State's plan for the Surface Roadway bear further examination for their impact on vehicular and pedestrian patterns in the Bulfinch Triangle. Other improvements planned for the District include a below-grade superplatform for Orange and Green line access. The MBTA is also studying the possibility of building a new commuter bus terminal on Causeway Street. The BRA will work with the MBTA to ensure that such a facility furthers the objectives of the Plan.

The transportation policy goals of the Bulfinch Triangle District Plan are:

- o to work with the State to relocate Haverhill Street in way which optimizes traffic and urban design considerations;
- o to modify the State's Plan so that Sumner Tunnel traffic is routed through the North Washington Street U-turn to simplify signal phasing at the intersection of New Chardon Street and the Surface Boulevard and improve pedestrian crossing conditions;
- o to review on-street loading procedures with the Boston Transportation Department to minimize traffic congestion;

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- o to re-establish the Bulfinch street grid and create attractive areas for pedestrian circulation.

7. Community Review

The Plan and Zoning regulations were prepared in consultation with the Downtown North Association, the Boston Preservation Alliance, and the Boston Landmarks Commission. The Boston Civic Design Commission voted to approve the Plan and Zoning on Tuesday, October 2, 1990.

On October 11, 1990, the BRA held a public hearing to consider the Bulfinch Triangle District Plan and Zoning. On that date, the BRA Board voted to take the matter under advisement, and keep the hearing open to solicit written public comments until October 22, 1990.

The Downtown North Association submitted testimony and written comments regarding several issues related to the Plan. On October 19, BRA staff met with representatives of the Downtown North Association. As a result, certain changes in the Plan and Zoning are recommended. These issues and their resolution are summarized in the table below:

8. Issues Raised During Comment Period

<u>ISSUE</u>	<u>RESOLUTION</u>
Flexibility in FAR	Up to one additional FAR point will be allowed for projects which include ground-floor retail
Project size threshold for daycare is too low for the Bulfinch Triangle	Project size threshold for inclusion of day care facilities is increased to 150,000 square feet based on the fact that the Bulfinch Triangle has 130 jobs per acre versus 780 jobs per acre for the Financial District or approximately one sixth the worker density.
City recommendations for modifications to the State's plan for the Artery Surface Road	As the State plan continues to evolve, staff will consult with Downtown North on the Surface Road

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Traverse Street should be
vehicular as well as
pedestrian

Staff will recommend the vehicular
use of Traverse Street and will
work with MBTA on design of bus
facility to achieve this goal

Merrimac street streetscape
improvements

Staff will consult with the Boston
Transportation Department regarding
streetscape standards for Merrimac
Street which could be used in the
entire District

In view of the satisfactory resolution of all of the issues
raised by the Bulfinch Triangle District community, the staff
recommends that the Director be authorized to take all actions
necessary to petition the Zoning Commission to adopt the Bulfinch
Triangle District Zoning as the new permanent zoning governing
this section of the downtown.

An appropriate vote follows:

VOTED: That the Bulfinch Triangle District Plan is hereby
adopted and the BRA Director is authorized to petition
the Zoning Commission to adopt the Zoning Text and Map
Amendment to the Boston Zoning Code necessary to
establish permanent zoning for the Bulfinch Triangle
District, in substantial accord with the documents
presented to the BRA on October 25, 1990.

